

1. An apparatus comprising:

a tunable optical element operable to:

receive a first input signal at an incidence angle;

receive a second input signal;

separate the first input signal into a first beam having a first optical path length and a second beam having a second optical path length, wherein the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the incidence angle of the first input signal; and

separate the second input signal into a third beam and a fourth beam;

and

a reflective element operable to reflect the first beam, the second beam, the third beam, and the fourth beam such that at least a portion of the beams interfere to produce an output signal, wherein the output signal comprises wavelength channels of the first input signal combined with wavelength channels of the second input signal.

2. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the tunable optical element comprises:

a first plate having a reflective region; and

a second plate having a partially reflective region and arranged a predetermined distance from the first plate;

wherein:

the first input signal is incident upon the partially reflective region of the second plate at the incidence angle to produce the first beam and the second beam;

the first beam is processed to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is processed to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

3. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein:

the first beam is transmitted by the partially reflective region of the second plate toward the reflective element to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is reflected by the partially reflective region of the second plate and the reflective region of the first plate to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

4. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein:

the first beam is reflected by the partially reflective region of the second plate toward the reflective element to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is transmitted by the partially reflective region of the second plate and reflected by the reflective region of the first plate to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

5. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein the distance between the first plate and the second plate is based upon a predetermined difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

6. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein the incidence angle of the first input signal is adjusted to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

7. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the incidence angle is adjusted by adjusting the optical path of the first input signal with respect to the tunable optical element.

8. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the incidence angle is adjusted by rotating the tunable optical element with respect to the optical path of the first input signal.

9. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein:
 - a portion of the distance between the first plate and the second plate is filled by a material having a particular index of refraction; and
 - the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the index of refraction of the material.
10. The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the index of refraction is adjusted to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.
11. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein:
 - the reflective element reflects the first beam and the second beam back toward the tunable optical element; and
 - the first beam interferes with the second beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the first beam and the second beam.
12. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein:
 - the reflective element reflects the third beam and the fourth beam back toward the tunable optical element; and
 - the third beam interferes with the fourth beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the third beam and the fourth beam.
13. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein adjusting the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length adjusts the spacing between the wavelength channels associated with the output signal.
14. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the reflective element comprises a mirror operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the first beam and the second beam.

15. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the reflective element comprises:
 - a mirror operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element one of the first beam and the second beam; and
 - a resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the other of the first beam and the second beam.

16. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the reflective element comprises:
 - a first resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element one of the first beam and the second beam; and
 - a second resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the other of the first beam and the second beam.

17. The apparatus of Claim 16, wherein:
 - the first resonator has a first center wavelength; and
 - the second resonator has a second center wavelength that is offset relative to the first center wavelength by approximately one half of the free spectral range of the first resonator such that the resonance frequencies of the second resonator are matched to the anti-resonance frequencies of the first resonator.

18. The apparatus of Claim 16, wherein:
 - the first resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a first optical thickness from the front surface;
 - the second resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a second optical thickness from the front surface; and
 - the difference between the optical thicknesses of the first and second resonators is approximately equal to one-quarter wavelength.

19. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the tunable optical element comprises a first tunable optical element, the apparatus further comprising a second tunable optical element.

20. The apparatus of Claim 19, wherein the second tunable optical element comprises:

a first plate having a partially reflective region; and

a second plate having a reflective region and arranged a predetermined distance from the first plate;

wherein the first beam interferes with the second beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the first beam and the second beam.

21. The apparatus of Claim 19, wherein the second tunable optical element comprises:

a first plate having a partially reflective region; and

a second plate having a reflective region and arranged a predetermined distance from the first plate;

wherein the third beam interferes with the fourth beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the third beam and the fourth beam.

22. A method for processing optical signals, comprising:

receiving a first input signal at an incidence angle;

receiving a second input signal;

separating the first input signal into a first beam having a first optical path length and a second beam having a second optical path length, wherein the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the incidence angle of the first input signal;

separating the second input signal into a third beam and a fourth beam; and

interfering at least a portion of the beams to produce an output signal, wherein the output signal comprises wavelength channels of the first input signal combined with wavelength channels of the second input signal.

23. The method of Claim 22, wherein separating the first input signal comprises:

transmitting a first portion of the first input signal to generate the first beam; and

reflecting a second portion of the first input signal to generate the second beam.

24. The method of Claim 23, wherein reflecting a second portion of the input signal comprises:

reflecting a second portion of the first input signal at a partially reflective interface to generate the second beam; and

reflecting the second beam at a totally reflective interface such that the second beam and the first beam propagate along substantially parallel optical paths.

25. The method of Claim 24, wherein:

the partially reflective interface is associated with a first plate;

the totally reflective interface is associated with a second plate; and

the distance between the first plate and the second plate is based upon a predetermined difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

26. The method of Claim 22, further comprising adjusting the incidence angle of the first input signal to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

27. The method of Claim 26, wherein adjusting the incidence angle comprises adjusting the optical path of the first input signal.

28. The method of Claim 25, wherein:

a portion of the distance between the first plate and the second plate is filled by a material having a particular index of refraction; and

the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the index of refraction of the material.

29. The method of Claim 28, further comprising adjusting the index of refraction to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

30. The method of Claim 22, wherein interfering comprises interfering the first beam with the second beam to introduce a phase shift between the first beam and the second beam.

31. The method of Claim 22, wherein:
the first input signal comprises a first input spectral band;
the second input signal comprises a second input spectral band; and
the output signal comprises an output spectral band that includes at least portions of the first input spectral band and the second input spectral band.

32. The method of Claim 22, further comprising adjusting the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length to adjust the spacing between the wavelength channels associated with the output signal.

33. The method of Claim 22, further comprising reflecting the first beam and the second beam using a mirror.

34. The method of Claim 22, further comprising:
reflecting one of the first beam and the second beam using a mirror; and
reflecting the other of the first beam and the second beam using a resonator.

35. The method of Claim 22, further comprising:
reflecting one of the first beam and the second beam using a first resonator; and
reflecting the other of the first beam and the second beam using a second resonator.

36. The method of Claim 35, wherein:
the first resonator has a first center wavelength; and
the second resonator has a second center wavelength that is offset relative to the first center wavelength by approximately one half of the free spectral range of the first resonator such that the resonance frequencies of the second resonator are matched to the anti-resonance frequencies of the first resonator.

37. The method of Claim 35, wherein:

the first resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a first optical thickness from the front surface;

the second resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a second optical thickness from the front surface; and

the difference between the optical thicknesses of the first and second resonators is approximately equal to one-quarter wavelength.

38. The method of Claim 22, wherein the output signal comprises a first output signal and further comprising:

receiving a second output signal; and

processing the first output signal and the second output signal to generate a third output signal, wherein the third output signal comprises wavelength channels of the first output signal combined with wavelength channels of the second output signal.

39. An optical system, comprising a multiplexer network operable to multiplex a plurality of input WDM signals into at least one output WDM signal, the multiplexer network comprising:

a tunable optical element operable to:

receive a first intermediate input signal at an incidence angle;

receive a second intermediate input signal;

separate the first intermediate input signal into a first beam having a first optical path length and a second beam having a second optical path length, wherein the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the incidence angle of the first intermediate input signal; and

separate the second intermediate input signal into a third beam and a fourth beam;

and

a reflective element operable to reflect the first beam, the second beam, the third beam, and the fourth beam such that at least a portion of the beams interfere to produce an intermediate output signal, wherein the intermediate output signal comprises wavelength

channels of the first intermediate input signal combined with wavelength channels of the second intermediate input signal.

40. The optical system of Claim 39, further comprising a demultiplexer network operable to demultiplex an input WDM signal into a plurality of wavelength channels, wherein:

the first intermediate input signal comprises a first subset of the plurality of wavelength channels; and

the second intermediate input signal comprises a second subset of the plurality of wavelength channels.

41. The optical system of Claim 40, further comprising an optical component communicatively coupled to the demultiplexer network and operable to process a portion of the wavelength channels.

42. The system of Claim 39, wherein the tunable optical element comprises:

a first plate having a reflective region; and

a second plate having a partially reflective region and arranged a predetermined distance from the first plate;

wherein:

the intermediate input signal is incident upon the partially reflective region of the second plate at the incidence angle to produce the first beam and the second beam;

the first beam is processed to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is processed to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

43. The system of Claim 42, wherein:

the first beam is transmitted by the partially reflective region of the second plate toward the reflective element to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and
the second beam is reflected by the partially reflective region of the second plate and the reflective region of the first plate to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

44. The system of Claim 42, wherein:

the first beam is reflected by the partially reflective region of the second plate toward the reflective element to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is transmitted by the partially reflective region of the second plate and reflected by the reflective region of the first plate to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

45. The system of Claim 42, wherein the first plate is arranged parallel to the second plate.

46. The system of Claim 42, wherein the distance between the first plate and the second plate is based upon a predetermined difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

47. The system of Claim 42, wherein the incidence angle of the intermediate input signal is adjusted to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

48. The system of Claim 47, wherein the incidence angle is adjusted by adjusting the optical path of the intermediate input signal with respect to the tunable optical element.

49. The system of Claim 47, wherein the incidence angle is adjusted by rotating the tunable optical element with respect to the optical path of the intermediate input signal.

50. The system of Claim 42, wherein:

a portion of the distance between the first plate and the second plate is filled by a material having a particular index of refraction; and

the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the index of refraction of the material.

51. The system of Claim 50, wherein the index of refraction is adjusted to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

52. The system of Claim 39, wherein:

the first beam emitted by the tunable optical element follows a first optical path toward the reflective element;

the second beam emitted by the tunable optical element follows a second optical path toward the reflective element; and

the first optical path is substantially parallel with the second optical path.

53. The system of Claim 39, wherein the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is substantially independent from the distance between the tunable optical element and the reflective element.

54. The system of Claim 42, wherein:

the reflective element reflects the first beam and the second beam back toward the tunable optical element; and

the first beam interferes with the second beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the first beam and the second beam.

55. The system of Claim 39, wherein:

the intermediate input signal comprises an input spectral band;

the first intermediate output signal comprises a first subset of the input spectral band; and

the second intermediate output signal comprises a second subset of the input spectral band that is complementary to the first subset of the input spectral band.

56. The system of Claim 55, wherein:

the intermediate input signal comprises a plurality of wavelength channels associated with the input WDM signal;

the first subset of the input spectral band comprises even wavelength channels; and
the second subset of the input spectral band comprises odd wavelength channels.

57. The system of Claim 39, wherein adjusting the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length adjusts the spacing between the wavelength channels associated with the first intermediate output signal and the second intermediate output signal.

58. The system of Claim 39, wherein the reflective element comprises a mirror operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the first beam and the second beam.

59. The system of Claim 39, wherein the reflective element comprises:

a mirror operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element one of the first beam and the second beam; and

a resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the other of the first beam and the second beam.

60. The system of Claim 59, wherein the resonator comprises a Gires-Tournois resonator.

61. The system of Claim 42, wherein:

the reflective element comprises a resonator having an optical thickness; and

the distance between the first plate and the second plate is based in part upon the optical thickness of the resonator.

62. The system of Claim 39, wherein the reflective element comprises:
a first resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element one of the first beam and the second beam; and
a second resonator operable to reflect back to the tunable optical element the other of the first beam and the second beam.

63. The system of Claim 62, wherein:
the first resonator has a first center wavelength; and
the second resonator has a second center wavelength that is offset relative to the first center wavelength by approximately one half of the free spectral range of the first resonator such that the resonance frequencies of the second resonator are matched to the anti-resonance frequencies of the first resonator.

64. The system of Claim 62, wherein:
the first resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a first optical thickness from the front surface;
the second resonator has a partially reflective front surface and a highly reflective back surface spaced a second optical thickness from the front surface; and
the difference between the optical thicknesses of the first and second resonators is approximately equal to one-quarter wavelength.

65. The system of Claim 64, wherein the first optical thickness is selected to produce a desired center frequency and free-spectral range such that even wavelength channels in the intermediate input signal are included in the first intermediate output signal and odd wavelength channels in the intermediate input signal are included in the second intermediate output signal.

66. The system of Claim 39, wherein the tunable optical element comprises a first tunable optical element, the reflective element further comprising a second tunable optical element.

67. The system of Claim 66, wherein the second tunable optical element comprises:

a first plate having a partially reflective region; and

a second plate having a reflective region and arranged a predetermined distance from the first plate;

wherein the first beam interferes with the second beam at the partially reflective region to introduce a phase shift between the first beam and the second beam.

68. The system of Claim 67, wherein:

the first beam is incident upon the partially reflective region to define at least a portion of the first optical path length; and

the second beam is reflected by the reflective region toward the partially reflective region to define at least a portion of the second optical path length.

69. The system of Claim 67, wherein the distance between the first plate and the second plate is based upon a predetermined difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

70. The system of Claim 67, wherein the second tunable optical element is rotatable to adjust the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

71. The system of Claim 67, wherein:

a portion of the distance between the first plate and the second plate is filled by a material having a particular index of refraction; and

the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length is based in part upon the index of refraction of the material.

72. The system of Claim 71, wherein the index of refraction is adjusted to tune the difference between the first optical path length and the second optical path length.

73. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a multiplexer operable to multiplex a plurality of input signals to produce the first input signal received by the tunable optical element.

74. The apparatus of claim 73 wherein the multiplexer comprises a selected one of an arrayed waveguide device, a diffraction grading device, a fiber Bragg grating device, a thin-film interference filter, or a second tunable optical element communicatively coupled to a second reflective element.

75. The method of claim 22 further comprising multiplexing a plurality of input signals to produce the first input signal.

76. The method of claim 75 wherein the step of multiplexing is performed by a selected one of an arrayed waveguide device, a diffraction grating device, a fiber Bragg grating device, or a thin-film interference filter.

77. The system of claim 39 further comprising a switch fabric communicatively coupled to the demultiplexer network.

78. The system of claim 77 wherein the switch fabric comprises an add/drop switch array comprising a plurality of input ports, add ports, drop ports, and output ports, the add/drop switch array operable to:

route wavelength channels from the input ports to the drop ports;

substitute wavelength channels from the add ports in place of the dropped wavelength channels; and

route wavelength channels from at least one of the input ports and the add ports to the output ports.

79. The system of claim 77 further comprising express lanes operable to communicate wavelength channels received from a demultiplexer network, wherein the multiplexer network is operable to receive wavelength channels from the switch fabric and the express lanes.

80. (New) The apparatus of claim 73 wherein a plurality of transmission peaks associated with the output signal are flatter than a plurality of transmission peaks associated with the first input signal.

81. (New) The method of claim 75 wherein a plurality of transmission peaks associated with the output signal are flatter than a plurality of transmission peaks associated with the first input signal.